Response on Surrey Fire and Rescue consultation from Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

Five questions were asked as part of the consultation:

Question 1: Do you agree with establishing a Combined Fire and Rescue Authority for Surrey? If not, what alternative would you propose?

Yes, in principle. The size and scale of an authority that covers the existing geography of Surrey makes sense and mirrors the current arrangements so would involve minimal disruption to operational structures. As the current arrangement for Surrey County Council is changing, the service cannot remain as it is. For some services within the footprint of Surrey there are considerations being given to "hosting" arrangements, with either Unitary authority providing service for the other part in this early transition phase. Given the long-term nature of this change establishing a stand-alone Fire and Rescue service makes sense, which could then service both unitary authorities and sit under a strategic mayoral authority, if one is established in due course.

However, there is no detailed information given on how a new governance model would work and whether it will, or need to be, democratically accountable, e.g. will there be a Fire and Rescue committee with key stakeholders (e.g. the two new authorities of East and West Surrey) as members who hold the Fire and Rescue service accountable; or an elected Fire and Rescue Commissioner, (noting the intended abolition of Police and Crime Commissioners).

If such structures are put in place, and given the fact that Police and Crime Commissioners are being disbanded, how will this proposed model be different, as they are taking a similar approach, e.g. police acting separately outside of a local authority? Have lessons been learned by the police example?

Question 2: Do you consider the proposed transfer could have any negative implications for public safety, and if so, what mitigations would be required to ensure services are not adversely affected?

It should not. As said in the consultation document this proposal considers the governance arrangements rather than the operational arrangements. Whatever is put in place however will need to ensure that there is transparency and accountability to the public about the fire and rescue service, as mentioned above.

Question 3: Do you agree to the formation of the shadow authority?

Yes

Question 4: If this is the case, would establishing the shadow authority before January be beneficial?

As soon as possible would be better to allow for the transition by April 2027 and would tie in with the LGR/FSA timetable.

Question 5: Are there any other considerations we should take into account?

What would the funding arrangements be for the new service?. No details are given on this. Would there be a separate precept collected through the council tax process? If so, there are potential impacts on the new Surrey authorities about collecting a new precept for the F&R service. This could involve additional resource, and consideration on how the money would be collected and distributed as well as feeding into the budget setting process in time for April 2027.

Changes may be required to ensure existing ICT systems in Unitaries can handle this change in the available time period before vesting day. Also there will need to be effective communications to ensure that residents don't see this as a significant increase in their council tax bill, but instead a transfer of funding from the legacy Surrey County Council to the new stand-alone service.